

# People in motion



**By Jackie Allen**

Photography by Cathy Morrison

## Lt. Rex Gooch

**Location:** Maryland Heights, Mo.

**Position:** Lieutenant, Maryland Heights Police Department

**Background:** Rex Gooch is a 19-year veteran of the Maryland Heights Police Department with 26 years of combined experience in law enforcement. Gooch serves as coordinator of a crash-reduction project on Interstate 270 at the edge of the I-70 interchange. This is a major route around the St. Louis metropolitan area.

Aggressive driving is a particular problem on northbound I-270 where two lanes exit onto I-70 ramps. During rush hours, these two lanes back up for miles. Impatient motorists drive past the lined-up traffic and abruptly “cut in” ahead of lines. This results in multiple rear-end crashes. Excessive speed is a continual problem in the remaining three lanes of traffic. According to Gooch, these conditions result in this highway corridor having the highest accident rate in the state.

“It is important to understand who is traveling this section of highway and what types of crashes are occurring,” Gooch says. “We can then begin to understand what we might be able to do to have an impact and reduce the crashes.”

**The Job:** As coordinator of the traffic-crash reduction project, Gooch looked at many factors to determine how to reduce the crashes along this stretch of highway. A committee was formed comprised of representatives from the Missouri Department of Transportation, the State Highway Patrol, Maryland Heights Police Department, and fire and emergency medical services. This approach incorporated all four safety areas: engineering, enforcement, education, and emergency response.

“It is sometimes a real challenge to feel you have a significant impact on an area if you’re just writing tickets,” Gooch explains. “In addition to changing driving behaviors, we

needed to impact the traffic flow and situations that can occur after a crash.”

MoDOT agreed to identify the northbound lanes of I-270 as an accident-reduction zone, painting double white lines on the pavement and posting appropriate signage to inform the public.

**How It’s Done:** Gooch coordinates an Office of Highway Safety grant for traffic enforcement along a stretch of I-270 designated as an accident-reduction zone and began an aggressive campaign that included enforcement and public education. A traffic vehicle was marked to catch the attention of drivers on I-270 and equipped with the latest technology in traffic enforcement. An officer was assigned specifically to patrol the eight-mile stretch of highway.

News releases about the project were sent to the local media. A radio was installed in the enforcement vehicle, allowing direct communication with the traffic helicopter and the media who provide news to the public about traffic conditions in the metro area.

Over a three-year period, the project has resulted in a 34 percent decrease in the accident rate when compared to the baseline rate.

**Favorite Part of the Job:** “I really enjoyed the sense of ownership that I had with this project and felt that we created a proactive approach to impact a traffic-crash problem.”

**After Hours:** Married 26 years with a 10-year old daughter, Gooch spends most of his time with family. Since his retirement as a Major from the U.S. Air Force Reserve, he has had more time to enter his antique Corvette in car shows. He is active with his church, veteran organizations and is a member of the Moolah Shriners of St. Louis. ■

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